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Wonder

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STATEMENT

Patterns hold a seductive beauty in both their production and consumption. We surround ourselves with repeating patterns in our dwellings and on our clothes; speak of patterns of weather, behavior, and thought; and often conceive of the sacred and its affiliated institutions through infinite patterns. Pattern-making and pattern-finding are inherent human compulsions. I am obsessed with pattern-making in my work; I cover the surfaces of my functional pots with patterns and create installations of repeating decorative motifs using modular ceramic tiles.

Much of our drive towards pattern-making, whether decorative, spiritual, or scientific, is about attempting to control and make sense of the surrounding world. This inevitably involves simplification, stylization, and the editing out of information that we do not understand or that does not “fit” our preconceived ideas. For instance, the patterns I use descend from scales and feathers; from petals; from snowflakes; and from flowers. I simplify and idealize these natural elements into repeatable forms that can be expanded infinitely. I do so in order to investigate what may be lost when we undertake such self-selection of the natural world. This rationalization of the rich, untamed uncertainty of nature inevitably leads to a loss of wonder. I find this darker undertone immensely sad.

The infinite is often tied to our sense of the sacred; when each unit of a pattern interlocks perfectly into place it is easy to see pattern as a reflection of sacred connectivity. Yet, our conception of the world and its resources as infinite has led to collapse of animal and plant ecosystems around the world many times over. The animals I paint onto the ceramics disrupt the sense of the infinite created by the formal patterns. The ephemeral and realistic paintings of animals that live, or in many cases used to live, in the Intermountain West disrupt and melt in and out of the infinite patterns that cover the pots and grow out from the walls. They appear upon and inside of objects that normally reside in the domestic space such as cups and bowls, functional objects that themselves are central to many everyday patterns of human behavior. The animal depictions are a reminder that we share this world with other beings who we so often forget about.

I aim to counter what E.O. Wilson names the Eremocene, or the age of loneliness, by introducing these animals back into our awareness in a way that includes some of their mystery and power, and which suggests our capacity for empathy towards them. The concept of depatterning – abandoning patterns of behavior that are no longer beneficial – is central to my explorations. It is clear to me that our current patterns of behavior no longer serve us as human beings, nor do they serve the world in which we live. We need to find a way of depatterning ourselves from ingrained destructive behaviors. The animal disruptions on my ceramic objects are one manifestation of my own attempts at depatterning what I know and replacing it with some greater unknown. With wonder.

WONDER is an exploration of the point at which what we know and what we think we know begins to break down. I melt and erode the perfect patterns I worked hard to construct through the manipulation of kiln atmosphere, using excess carbon, wood, and soda ash. I then add ephemeral, delicate imagery of animals in china paint. These steps introduce elements of the unknown and unpredictable onto intimate objects at the core of domestic human life. By disrupting organized patterns and reintroducing the animals we share the world with, I explore the question: What is lost when we surround ourselves with objects and systems of knowledge that reflect only the human mind? The word “wonder” implies attentiveness, appreciation, and curiosity, qualities that greatly enrich my own life and my experiences in both nature and the studio. Ultimately, my work is about bringing back some of that wonder that seems to be absent from much of human existence in the modern world.